

percent savings. Procedures like MRIs, CAT scans, colonoscopies can run anywhere from 700 to 3,000 bucks. Your insurance companies seem to always shove you to the most expensive one. They give you these huge discounts, take their margin out of it, and it still costs you a bundle.

When the consumer gets engaged, you will see prices start to come down. LASIK surgery is the best example, where you have no insurance involved. Ten, fifteen years ago, that could be up to \$2,000 an eye. Now, it is advertised heavily, providers go after their customers, and you can probably get it done for as little as \$250 to \$500 an eye, with better quality. That sounds like a lot of other areas of our economy that actually work.

Last Congress, I put healthcare transparency at the forefront of my agenda and have definitely been the most outspoken Senator that we have a broken system; put almost all the blame on the industry itself because it does not give us transparency. It does not want to compete. The healthcare customer is somewhat to blame because they don't want to pay for anything. And I don't think the answer is bringing more government into it until you reform the system.

We need to shine light on the dark corners and the misaligned incentives embedded in the current system. Among the bills I will reintroduce this Congress is the Healthcare PRICE Transparency Act. Every Senator should want to be on that bill to hold the industry accountable. This will empower patients through transparency. It will drive competition among hospitals and insurers by requiring them to publicly disclose their prices so patients can compare between providers and insurers.

Last Congress, a number of my colleagues joined in my effort to bring more transparency and affordability to healthcare consumers. I am excited to reintroduce the Healthcare PRICE Transparency Act soon and hope all of my colleagues will join in so that we can collectively lower healthcare costs before we try to get more government involved.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

SUNSHINE WEEK

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Madam President, I am proud to join my colleagues in celebration of Sunshine Week and promote the importance of government openness and transparency. Transparency isn't something you see too much up here in Washington. Being accountable to the American people should be a basic function of government.

In Florida, we have sunshine laws to promote openness and build our citizens' trust in government. When I came to Washington, I made it my mission to bring the success and transparency we had in Florida to the Federal Government and make this dys-

functional place work for the American people.

Unfortunately, my Democratic colleagues have blocked nearly every single one of my efforts for transparency and requests for information to help Congress make the best decisions for American families.

Last month, I wrote to President Biden's Acting Director for the Office of Management and Budget requesting any documents related to enacted but currently unspent COVID-19 stimulus funding. The response? None. Total silence.

This month, as we considered the Democrats' wasteful and partisan \$1.9 trillion COVID spending package, I introduced a resolution calling on President Biden to inform the Senate and the American people of how much unspent funds are left over from the previous COVID spending bills, but Democrats blocked it.

When my colleague Senator JOHNSON called for their massive, 600-page bill to be read on the floor so the American people could know exactly what was in the bill, Democrats complained and called it a waste of time.

Let me be clear. Being transparent, open, and accountable to the American people is actually never a waste of time; it is our job. That is why I have been working on several measures to bring sunshine transparency to Washington, including my bill to make sure Members of Congress work for the American people and actually read bills before casting their votes and my STOP COVID-19 Act to set vaccine distribution reporting and transparency standards for States and create a program for cities and counties to increase funding, testing, contact tracing, and transparency efforts in order to reduce the spread of COVID.

I will never stop fighting to bring sunshine to Washington and working to make sure our government and the Biden administration are transparent, open, and accountable to the American people who elected us to serve.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. PORTMAN. Madam President, I want to start by thanking Senator ERNST for once again setting up the Government Sunshine Week event and for her commitment, as was just discussed by my colleague from Florida, to ensuring taxpayers know where their money is going. This includes the \$150 billion that the U.S. Government distributes every year in taxpayer funds for research grants. More transparency will help ensure that research isn't stolen by China and other countries.

In 2019, as the then-chairman of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, or PSI, I led a bipartisan investigation with then-ranking-member Senator TOM CARPER into China's theft of U.S. intellectual property and U.S. research at our research institutions and college campuses.

As many of you know, China has made no secret of its goal to surpass the United States as the world leader in scientific research. This has become even clearer, by the way, during the COVID-19 pandemic, as China has attempted to get information in the United States to help produce their own vaccines to rival ours. But what most don't know is that China has been using our taxpayer-funded research enterprise here in the United States to accomplish this long-term goal. China uses talent recruitment programs—most notably its Thousand Talents Plan—to recruit researchers at American universities and research institutions using taxpayer-funded grants to do the same research at shadow labs in China or transfer taxpayer-funded research back to China—research that has been used over the past two decades to strengthen China's military and its own economic rise.

Along the way, they have been aided by a lack of transparency in our Federal grant-making process that has allowed researchers to receive taxpayer funding without disclosing their ties to foreign governments. What is worse, Federal law enforcement officials at the FBI knew about this for years and admitted at our PSI hearing last Congress: "We wish we had taken more rapid and comprehensive action in the past." I wish they had.

I am pleased the Trump administration chose to follow through on their promise to do better in this regard. Since our report, prosecutors have charged at least 13 researchers here in the United States for failing to disclose their ties to the Chinese Government and Chinese Communist Party—researchers at prestigious institutions like Harvard and the Ohio State University. Many of our colleges and universities around the country have been part of this.

The Biden administration must stand by the promises made on the campaign trail to keep the pressure on China, and that includes on this issue. We can also help here in Congress by shining a light on the grant-making process and passing laws to help us keep track and protect these important investments in our research.

In the coming weeks, I will be reintroducing bipartisan legislation called the Safeguarding American Innovation Act, which uses the key findings from our bipartisan PSI investigation and report to protect the research enterprise—in part, through more transparency.

First, our bill creates a cross-governmental council at the Office of Management and Budget to coordinate and streamline unauthorized access and grant-making processes between Federal Agencies so that there is greater transparency in where the money is going and how it is being used.

Second, the Safeguarding American Innovation Act makes it illegal to lie on a grant application about ties to

foreign governments like China. Transparency here will make it clear that researchers are liable for attempting to mislead the government when trying to receive taxpayer funds.

Third, our legislation closes loopholes exploited by China and other foreign actors and empowers the State Department to deny visas to foreign researchers aiming to steal U.S. intellectual property and research.

Fourth, the Safeguarding American Innovation Act requires research institutions and universities to safeguard against unauthorized access to sensitive technology and to be transparent with the State Department about what technologies a foreign researcher will have access to on campus.

Finally, the act requires transparency from our colleges and universities as to what money they are getting from foreign sources. They will have to report any foreign gift of \$50,000 or more, and it empowers the Department of Education to fine universities that repeatedly fail to disclose these gifts. Current law requires reporting, but at \$250,000. We found that nearly 70 percent of U.S. universities consistently failed to do even that. Lowering the threshold increases transparency, and adding the penalty ensures the schools will report.

The American Council on Education has supported our PSI report's recommendation that research institutions should establish a "know your collaborator" culture.

Greater transparency in our Federal grant-making process, great transparency from our research institutions and universities—these are the steps we need to take to ensure that there is proper accountability in place for the \$150 billion that taxpayers entrust with the government for federally funded research every year, while still keeping our fundamental research open and collaborative.

The Safeguarding American Innovation Act will shine a light on the Federal grant-making processes and allow us to maintain our world-class lead in innovations, while protecting our investments from foreign theft.

Again, I want to thank my colleague Senator ERNST, in particular, for this event today to talk about transparency, and I urge my colleagues to support this important legislation that will provide long overdue transparency in our federally funded research enterprise.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. LANKFORD. Madam President, about 4 weeks ago, it got cold in Oklahoma—really cold. My house was at negative 14 degrees. Now, Senator STEVE DAINES from Montana is used to that, but in Oklahoma we are not used to negative 14 degrees. It was overcast, snowy, cold. Then, the sun broke through, and we had a day when it got up to 30 degrees. It was like everyone was going to the park. It felt so nice because the sun was out, even though it was cold.

Sunshine has a great way of making everyone lift and look around and say: Where has that been?

I think that happens in the Federal Government as well.

I thank Senator JONI ERNST for hosting what she is calling Sunshine Week to be able to say: What are we doing to put a little light into the Federal process to be able to make sure people can see into some of these programs? Because all the time I hear from people, and when something comes on the news, they will say: Where did that come from?

I will say: That was poked in some bill that probably no one read.

I will give you an example of it. Two weeks ago, when the "COVID" bill passed with almost \$2 trillion in spending, I already had folks come back to me saying: I am grateful for that \$70 million for the Small Business Administration to increase some of the loans by \$70 million.

I said: Great. Do you know how much the administrative cost was on that \$70 million program?

The answer is \$390 million in administrative costs, \$70 million in loans. That is in the bill.

Everyone looks at me and says: Oh, I didn't know that.

In lots of States around America right now, their legislatures are meeting, including mine in Oklahoma. They are suddenly finding out that that bill that was for "COVID-related" mandated that no State in America could reduce taxes on anyone. Lots of States are saying: Wait a minute; we were planning on reducing taxes on working families in certain targeted areas.

They are finding out that you can't do that, and they will say things like: I didn't know that was in the bill because there wasn't any sunshine on that bill.

I worked for years to pass a bill called the Taxpayers Right-To-Know Act. It is a commonsense bill. It asks a simple question: What programs do we do in the Federal Government? This body has heard about me talk about it year after year after year. Contrary to popular belief, it is not easy to actually move a bill in this place. Some things that are very commonsense take forever.

This was my simple bill. In the Federal Government, every Agency has to list every program that they do, how many employees they hire to do that program, what is the cost of the program, and is the program evaluated? If it is, just put the evaluation numbers with the program.

Why would I say that? Because I talk to Agency heads that start a new program and they get 2 years down the road from starting a new program and they find out a different Agency has already done that for 5 years. Then we get together and find out a third Agency started that 10 years ago. None of them knew about the other program.

Before you think that doesn't happen, oh, yes, it does. It happens all the

time. Not only that, but I want to ask a simple question to say: How many options do we have for whatever it may be? How many programs do we have for STEM education, for instance? How many different incentives have we put out there, and how many Agencies are helping to provide greater STEM education? The Agencies can't tell me. They could eventually tell me what is in their Agency, but they don't know what other Agencies are doing.

And when I go to the GAO, the Government Accountability Office, and ask them, their answer is: I will get you an answer back in about 18 months—months—18 months before they can tell me how many STEM programs we have in the Federal Government. I should be able to do an internet search and get that in 18 seconds, not 18 months.

The Taxpayers Right-To-Know bill requires the Office of Management and Budget to actually work with every Agency to get a master list of every program across the Federal Government—how many employees they have, if it is evaluated, and what it does.

It is pretty simple. It is basic transparency, but it allows any American and all Members of Congress to be able to see what we do and if we have duplication in government.

Again, you may think that is simple and straightforward. It is, but it took years to actually pass. We finally got that passed and signed into law last December.

I met with Gene Dodaro, who heads up GAO, and asked him about it because he has also been an advocate of that for years. He said: We need an "unequivocal commitment from the Office of Management and Budget to implement it properly" because we have to actually get this done.

Sunshine helps. We can see how money is spent. We can see how duplication actually functions. We can't reform what we can't see. The American people perpetually get frustrated with what they didn't know was in a bill and find out later, and they don't like it.

In the days ahead, I will release my annual "Federal Fumbles" book, as we do every year. In that "Federal Fumbles" book, this year, we are going to outline where our debt comes from because I run into so many people who say: We have debt. Who is our debt? Is it all China?

I will say: Well, actually, \$1.6 trillion of it is from China, and we are paying them interest every single year on that debt. But it is in a lot of other places.

A lot of people misunderstand what government debt really is. This needs some sunshine because if we are going to solve this, the American people have to be able to see it and so do we.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

NOMINATION OF XAVIER BECERRA

Mr. DAINES. Madam President, I rise to share my objections to the nomination of Xavier Becerra to be Secretary of Health and Human Services.